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ABSTRACT

The purpose of a study was to develop a curriculum for the National 4-H Executive Development Institute. The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy approved five 1-week sessions to be held every 6 months for 2 years. A Delphi panel selected items for a questionnaire used to determine curriculum content. Using a random numbers table, a 50 percent sample of state extension directors, state 4-H leaders, state training leaders, and administrators of land-grant Extension programs was selected for participation in the study. Seventy-four of 91 surveys were returned. The mean responses to these were computed and rank ordered for the top 10 content areas for each of the five sessions of the Institute. These 5 lists of 10 were returned to the sample of 91 persons, with 62 returned. The content areas receiving the highest priority were the following: (1) managing human resources--communications, human relations and team building, staff development, performance appraisals and standards; (2) strategic planning--understanding mission, involving relevant groups, assessing strengths and weaknesses, maximizing benefits; (3) politics, policy, and Extension--the educator's role, creating change, ethics, networking; (4) developing financial resources--securing resources, involving volunteers in development, making and cultivating contacts, evaluating the development program; and (5) futures--having a personal and 4-H futures perspective, future of families and human development, future of volunteerism, techniques for planning. The study provides an overall national feel for executive training and learner needs. The use of these rankings should help to generate a curriculum that is reflective of both the organization and the learner group. (KC)

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Empowering for Organizational Leadership: A Systems Approach to Curriculum Development in A Complex Organization

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Empowering for Organizational Leadership:
A Systems Approach to Curriculum Development
in A Complex Organization

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop a curriculum for the National 4-H Executive Development Institute. A modified Delphi technique was used in a curriculum development process based on Ralph Tyler's sources of objectives (Tyler, 1949). Subject specialists and administrators' knowledge of contemporary society were used to empower the learners as rising executives in Extension administration. Combining the learner's needs with involvement in planning by their own administrators should empower participants to meet personal, developmental, and organizational objectives. The results of this study should help the planning committees to understand what state administrators perceive to be the executive development needs for future 4-H administrators. It can also add to the body of research on executive development training needs.

The National 4-H Executive Development Institute

In 1986 the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) approved a proposal for an executive development institute with the purpose of providing a national pool of future state 4-H program administrators. The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy consists of state Extension directors and other Extension representatives and is intended to be representative of Extension administration nationwide. ECOP approved five one-week sessions to be held

every six months for two years with application projects to be implemented between sessions.

Sessions were entitled:

1. Managing Human Resources.
2. Strategic Planning.
3. Politics, Policy, and Extension.
4. Developing and Managing Financial Resources.
5. Moving 4-H into the Twenty-first Century (futures research).

A Coordinating Committee was appointed by ECOP with membership representing the four national Extension Regions, USDA, ECOP, the National 4-H Council, both 1862 and 1890 land-grant university Extension programs, and state level administration; 4-H, and staff development. Brochures were sent to each state Extension Service in the fall of 1986. The brochures stated that the purpose of the Institute is to provide "promising Extension professional staff members with analytical and managerial skills to be used in mobilizing peoples, ideas and resources in support of the State Cooperative Extension Service 4-H Programs. It is anticipated that graduates from this institute will assume leadership roles as 4-H moves into the 21st century." Overall objectives for the institute include: (National 4-H Executive Development Institute, 1986)

* To enrich understanding of the nature and role of 4-H youth development as a public educational institution; its structure, behavioral characteristics and relationships with its environment, personnel and mission.

* To enhance understanding of the roles of the state Extension leaders and specialists in management processes such as decision-making, personnel development, resource allocation and public relations.

* To examine and strengthen managerial problem solving and leadership skills.

* To share challenges and experiences with colleagues from across the country to create a network of administrative and program expertise.

States were asked to nominate two participants from each state and one from each 1890 institution. Forty-one states nominated a total of seventy-eight candidates from which fifty-five participants from thirty-five states were selected.

The coordinating committee decided that a curriculum development process should be used that provided a research base for making curriculum decisions within the broad topic of each session. A modified Delphi technique was explored and chosen as a helpful tool in this particular situation. The following discussions give a conceptual framework and a partial history of the use of the Delphi technique.

Conceptual Framework

Curriculum Development

Ralph Tyler (1949) presents a multi-faceted approach to curriculum development that uses the learners, studies of life situations, and subject specialists as well as educational philosophy and learning theory as sources of information. This approach provides a perspective for curriculum planners that includes the needs of learners, the environment in which they exist, and the expertise of scholars who have studied the area of interest. This is a helpful approach for developing the 4-H Institute curriculum since the participants are not the only stakeholders in the experience and are considered to be in the process of developing as executives. Others present similar approaches to developing effective performance that recognize the

need for both organizations and individuals to be involved in decisions about staff development needs (Boone, 1985; Knowles, 1980; Schein, 1978; Murphy, 1983; Pitner, 1981; Heim, 1981; Braid, 1987; and Lippitt & Taylor, 1983). Both developing managers and present administration were included in planning because administrators have knowledge of the present situation, and especially of contemporary society as it relates to the organization. Administrators are also knowledgeable about the organizational philosophies, climate, and needs. This not only empowers the developing executives by providing information on organizational needs, but also empowers them to operate within a culture. Management theories and concepts must be viewed in light of the actual philosophies and norms of the organization. Also, administrators may provide information based on false assumptions, which can be balanced by subject specialists.

Executive Development

Research in executive and management development presents two important and broad concepts to consider in designing executive development programs. The first concept is the difference between skills and competencies. This is also presented as core-contingency models of management which present certain core competencies that are essential in all management situations and skills that are particular to certain situations (Lippitt & Taylor, 1983, p. 19; Dyer, 1983; and Lindahl, 1984). People are able to learn both types of skills, but there is some disagreement as to what can be learned in training as opposed to on the job.

This argument is the second concept important to executive development design. Some authors say that management skills and competencies can only be learned on the job through self-development and coaching (Watson, 1979; Cloud, 1981; and Hague, 1974). Others write that training can stimulate thought, assess styles, and provide practice while on-the-job application is an important part of the total process (Lippitt, 1983; Black, 1979; Braid, 1987; Watson, 1979; and Murphy, 1983).

The skills and competencies identified by research are also important to the development of the Institute's curriculum. As will be seen in the following discussion, a panel of experts was used to identify content areas for the survey instrument. It was assumed that these experts were knowledgeable in relevant research, so a literature review on other executive development studies or programs was used to explore the validity of the results. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on results.

Methods

Delphi Technique

Delphi was originated around 1950 with the Rand Corporation and Omar Helmer given credit for its development. Its original purpose was to predict or forecast the military needs of the United States. Since then it has been used extensively as a forecasting technique and as a tool for exploring issues, bringing concensus, and group decision-making. It has also been the subject of extensive criticism (Linstore & Turoff, 1975; and Rieger, 1986).

One of the most prominent critics also provides a description of "conventional Delphi." Sackman (1974, pp. 7-8) describes its characteristics as a paper-and-pencil questionnaire consisting of "a series of items" that are "generated by the director, participants, or both." Instructions accompany the questionnaire which "is administered to the participants for two or more rounds," the results of which are given back to participants in the form of "statistical feedback" for responding to the next round. Verbal feedback may or may not be given and all responses are anonymous. Respondents who are in the extreme quartiles of responses may be asked to justify responses. Rounds are continued until "concensus" or a "point of diminishing returns" is reached. "Participants do not meet face to face and may be geographically remote from one another."

Dalkey (1972) promotes Delphi as a promising technique for identifying goals and objectives for the "short run" as opposed to a greater understanding of human nature and social process being significant to quality of life in the "long run." He identifies the major strengths of Delphi as the pooling of expertise, the absence of domination by a single idea in non-face-to-face interaction, and the improvement of response accuracy with several rounds.

Research by critics and users of Delphi have disagreed with many of the identified strengths (Nanus, Wooten, & Barko, 1973; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Weatherman & Swenson, 1974; Sackman, 1974; Reiger, 1986; and Hogarth, 1978). They identify issues such as choosing experts, use of valid procedures, definition and presentation of consensus, controls by Delphi director, promotion of stereotypical

thinking, and forced consensus, among others.

Sackman (1974) is more critical of Delphi as a forecasting tool than as a communications tool for setting priorities as it has been used in this study. Other authors (Turoff, 1971; Nanus, Wooten, and Barko, 1973; Nelms, 1983; Weatherman & Swenson, 1974; Weaver, 1971; and Adelson, et. al, 1967) see Delphi's greatest strength as a communications tool for decision-making. It can be especially helpful where large numbers, long geographic distances, and complex subjects are involved.

Questionnaire Generation

For this study a panel of experts was selected to generate items to be included in the questionnaire. Expertise was defined in ways which included being an author of a book or other publications on the subject or holding a position that demanded research and expertise in a field. This panel of experts either generated or critiqued lists of content items for each of the five sessions. In all cases but one, a list of twenty was generated. The list with twenty-two items was reduced to twenty by combining concepts. Items were then reduced to short phrases to decrease the amount of time it would take to complete the questionnaire. According to Salancik (1971) this procedure decreased the chances for consensus because of items being open to interpretation. A pilot test of the instrument revealed the items to be understandable by administrators.

Sample Selection and Response Rates

Using a random numbers table, a fifty percent sample of State Extension Directors, State 4-H Leaders, State Training Leaders, and

1890 Administrators was selected for participation in the study. Seventy-four surveys were returned from the 91 mailed out (81%). The mean responses to these were computed. A rank order for the top ten content areas for each of the five sessions was generated. These five lists of ten were returned to the total sample (91). Sixty-two first round respondents also returned the second round. An additional eleven responses were received for the second round. For the purposes of curriculum development all responses were included. More in-depth analysis is done with only the sixty-two continuing respondents. Learners were asked to react to Administrators responses for the second round. A response rate of 76% was obtained for the first round and 65% for the second.

Results

For the purposes of this paper the two ranked sets of fifty items will not be listed but a summary will be given. The following is a summary of content areas receiving the highest priority.

Managing Human Resources
- Communications
- Human relations and team-building
- Staff development
- Performance appraisals and standards

Strategic Planning
- Understanding mission
- Involving relevant groups
- Assessing strengths and weaknesses
- Maximizing benefits

Politics, Policy, and Extension
- The educator's role
- Creating change
- Ethics
- Networking

Developing Financial Resources
- Securing resources
- Involving volunteers in a development program
- Making and cultivating contacts
- Evaluating the development program

Futures
- Having a personal and 4-H futures perspective
- Future of families and human development
- Future of volunteerism
- Techniques for planning

In every case the total rank order for each session changed with the second round. There was a large degree of variation but responses did tend to cluster around items. In most cases between 65% and 75% of the responses could be found within one standard deviation of the mean for the second round. Only three items had less than 60% within one standard deviation and the lowest item was 54%.

Conclusions and Implications

The way that items were worded (Salancik, 1971) and the use of a mean ranking in the second round probably lessened the chances of reaching a consensus since this left items open to interpretation and lessened the control of the director on forcing consensus. The study was also limited by the number of rounds, but some authors (Martino, 1972; Erffmeyer, Erffmeyer & Lane, 1986) see two rounds as optimal in most cases.

The study provides a ranked order in which each respondent had an equal say without domination by any individual or group (Dalkey, 1972). It also provides an overall national feel for executive training needs and learner needs. The use of these two rankings should help to generate a curriculum that is both reflective of the organization and the learner group. This should not only empower the

learner to meet individual needs, but aspirations, as well.

The lists generated are not inconsistent with other studies or programs on executive training (Lippitt, 1983; London, 1985; Pearse, 1974; Dyer, 1983; Farnsworth, 1975; Black, 1979; Braid, 1987; Baird, 1984; Cloud, 1981; Hahn, 1985; Nusz, 1986; Mentkowski, 1982; and Mintzberg, 1973). Of these studies, two concepts are evident that are not included in any priority list but have been addressed in different ways. First, problem-solving and decision-making skills are a part of the methods used at the institute. Second, intellectual skills were identified as a criteria for selection for the institute.

The results of evaluations by the participants support the intended purpose of empowering the learners. Overall evaluations rated the Institute's value to their career as 7.4 on an 8 point scale and value to their work as 7.139. The average rating for appropriateness of the content was 8.404 on a 10 point scale. Written comments reflected a feeling of appropriateness of the content even when presentation methods were not favorable. These indicators suggest that learners felt the content was useful.

The involvement of administrators in planning was also a strong marketing tool. Many of the people responsible for deciding whether their state would invest funds in sending participants were also involved in the curriculum development process. This, again, empowered the learners because without administrative support, there would not be an institute. The investment of money and time by state Extension Services and participants will amount to about $362,500.00 during the two years of the Institute. This represents a strong

commitment by both organizations and individuals to empower learners to move an educational institution into the 21st Century.

Empowering the learners of the National 4-H Executive Development Institute will be a product of their commitment, support of their state staffs in their application projects and the stimulation of the five one-week sessions. Using the results of this modified Delphi study to plan the curriculum for those sessions is providing experiences based on subject expertise, administrative experience, and learner needs.

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